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Summary

In response to the request of the General Assembly in its resolution 59/55 of 2 December 2004, and as a follow-up to the reports previously submitted by the Secretary-General in 2002, 2003 and 2004 (A/57/262-E/2002/82, A/58/152 and A/59/346), the present report highlights the development challenges facing Member States, and, on the basis of the responses to a questionnaire submitted to the Member States, it reviews the measures adopted in the last 5 to 10 years to respond to those challenges through the revitalization of public administration systems. The report further considers the lessons learned by Member States in making the transition from externally influenced to home-grown and demand-driven public administration reforms.

The future of public administration, according to the report, lies in the institution of measures aimed not only at reaffirming the developmental role of public administration and upholding its core values, but also at reconfiguring public service organizations into open, participative, knowledge-sharing, innovating and results-oriented service-delivery systems. Among the tensions that are expected to arise in the study and practice of public administration in coming years are those between the demand for change and the need for institutional "tradition" (and memory); between managerial flexibility and the integrity of rules; between domestic concerns and supranational obligations; and between pressing, short-term problems and long-term, strategic issues. Above all, the report stresses the need to strengthen the role of the United Nations in public administration, particularly with respect to collaborating with Member States and other partners in the implementation of capacity-building and knowledge-sharing initiatives in support of public administration reform.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 59/55 of 2 December 2004, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to its sixtieth session on progress made in Member States by revitalizing public administration during the last 10 years. The present report sets out to meet that request.

2. The report builds on an earlier one entitled "Five-year assessment of the progress made in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/225 on public administration and development" (A/56/127-E/2001/101). The 2001 assessment identified a number of priorities in public administration reform, among them promoting democratization and decentralization; developing legal and institutional frameworks and economic governance systems; implementing ethics and anti-corruption strategies; improving resource mobilization and financial management systems; and tapping the potential of e-government. The 2001 report noted a close affinity between the reforms being instituted in many countries and the priorities identified in resolution 50/225. Above all, it concluded that the sustainability of ongoing reform programmes hinged on substantial investment in human and institutional capacity-building.

3. To update and deepen the understanding of public administration reforms implemented in the last 10 years, the Secretariat requested the Member States to respond to a questionnaire (annex I) targeting a variety of public administration revitalization measures undertaken to promote macroeconomic stability and economic growth, human development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, civil society participation in the policy and development process, responsiveness to citizen concerns, conflict prevention and resolution efforts, public safety and security, transparency and accountability, efficiency, effectiveness and any other priorities unique to each of the respondent countries. The United Nations regional commissions and regional public administration organizations were approached with the same set of questions.

4. Responses were received from 40 countries spread over five continents and from the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia. The countries were Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Barbados, Belarus, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Cyprus, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, El Salvador, Fiji, Finland, Georgia, Guatemala, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Madagascar, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand, Norway, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Serbia and Montenegro, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, the United Republic of Tanzania and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

5. Using the responses from Member States and additional materials (particularly those collected from global and regional conferences on public administration) as a point of departure, the present report offers global, rather than country-specific, perspectives in public administration revitalization. Based on the premise that revitalization is a dynamic process, the report provides snapshots of reform and revitalization efforts within and across the world regions. Against the backdrop of the momentous socio-economic changes taking place worldwide, the report highlights the challenges confronting public administration systems as they implement different types of innovative and capacity-strengthening measures. Among the issues raised in the report are those concerning the scope, impact and

sustainability of public administration reforms; the capacities needed to design, implement and monitor the reforms; and the strategies to be employed in surmounting obstacles to change.

II. Global challenges and public administration

6. The challenges facing public administration worldwide have multiplied since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolutions 49/136 of 19 December 1994 and 50/225 of 19 April 1996. The world has, in the last few years, witnessed dramatic changes, among them the accelerated development of information and communication technologies, the emergence of trading blocs and economic unions, mass migrations accompanied by the tightening of border controls, growing intercultural interactions (marked at times by mutual understanding and at others by tension), economic liberalization (with an increasing risk of exposing national economies to global crises), expanding opportunities for the movement of goods and capital, climatic and environmental changes with catastrophic consequences,[1] the marketing of new drugs and genetically modified food products and the discovery of mysterious diseases[2] that recognize no political or geographical boundaries.

7. While many countries were still struggling with the new realities of globalization and liberalization and were in the process of introducing a variety of governance and economic reforms, the events of 11 September 2001 occurred, placing security firmly on the public policy agenda in a number of them. Nonetheless, around the world there is an increasing realization that security needs to be broadly defined to include human concerns, particularly concerns for the socio-economic welfare of the people, for freedom from want and for civic and individual rights, including the right to development along separate but mutually non-threatening paths.

8. How quickly developing countries, particularly the least developed ones, emerge from poverty and achieve improved living standards depends partly on the support of the international community but also on the effectiveness of national public administration systems in implementing the poverty reduction components of the Millennium Development Goals. Those concerns explain the attention given in recent years to measures aimed at enhancing the policymaking capacity and the service-delivery capacities of public administration systems worldwide.

9. As mentioned in subsequent paragraphs, the objectives and strategies of public administration revitalization are as varied as the challenges encountered at different times and places. This is to be expected. In a world characterized by diversity of culture and by disparities in socio-economic and political conditions, public administration revitalization cannot be projected in a monochromatic format, but rather in a way that vividly brings out the various hues and circumstances distinguishing one environment from another.

Regional priorities and public administration

10. Africa is a case in point. The dominant public policy and management issues in this region of approximately 650 million people are how to sustain ongoing governance and public administration reforms, alleviate poverty, restore normalcy to

countries emerging from conflict and reconstruct institutions devastated by civil strife and, in some circumstances, by decades of dictatorial rule. Under the leadership of the African Union, and within the context of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), wealth creation is being pursued as a new strategy in the war on poverty.

11. At the present time, access to the basic necessities of life (food, potable water, housing, fuel and energy) is highly restricted in Africa. Social services and infrastructure have largely collapsed owing to a lack of resources for their upkeep. Life expectancy in the region declined from 49 years in 1999 to 46 years in 2001 owing largely to the impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.[3] However, life expectancy in Africa is projected to rise to 51.3 years by the end of 2010 and to reach 69.5 years by 2045.[4] Nevertheless, recent forecasts indicate that, in the absence of a substantial infusion of resources, child poverty in the world's poorest countries (a significant number of which are in Africa) will not be reduced within the 15 years expected by the Millennium Development Goals, but in 150 years. The human development index has not improved significantly from 1997 (0.463) to 2001 (0.468). Between 1975 and 1999, 22 countries suffered setbacks in the human development index. Of that number, 13 (that is, more than half) were in Africa.[5] Among the plausible explanations for the lacklustre performance on the human development front are governance and public administration weaknesses, the failure to reflect poverty concerns in budget allocations and the exclusion of the poor from decisions affecting their life and well-being.

12. In response to the unfolding challenges, the African public service ministers, at a meeting held in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in May 2003, agreed on a programme of action aimed at revitalizing the continent's public administration systems. The measures accorded high priority under the programme include the acquisition of e-government capacities, the adoption of ethics mainstreaming and anti-corruption policies, human resources development, the improvement of budgeting and financial management practices, civic engagement in the policy process and the application of innovative service-delivery mechanisms.

13. With respect to the Middle East and North Africa, the dominant revitalization concerns are how to enhance the capacity of public administration systems to engineer high economic growth rates, respond to the needs of the people (particularly young persons) and ensure peace and security within and across countries. Like sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa is confronted with the challenges of economic growth and, to a lesser degree, of poverty alleviation. Not so long ago, the Middle East and North Africa achieved high (almost 10 per cent) gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates. Impressive economic performance enabled the region to invest in human and infrastructure development. In recent years, GDP growth rates within the region have averaged less than 2 per cent. Trade deficits and falling per capita growth continue to pose significant public policy and management challenges in the diversified (non-oil) economies.[6] To surmount the obstacles to growth within the region, it will be necessary to bring into the mainstream the ethos of transparency and accountability and to promote the adoption of innovative service-delivery processes.

14. With regard to Asia and the Pacific, the revitalization of public administration has to address enormous poverty alleviation and human development challenges.

With a population of 3.4 billion, Asia and the Pacific is faced with enormous challenges in the area of human development.

15. Of the 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty (living on less than one United States dollar per day) worldwide, two thirds are in Asia.[7] While the aggregate poverty ratio has fallen in recent years (rural poverty declined from 39 to 28 per cent and urban poverty fell from 24 to 20 per cent between 1990 and 2000), poverty remains a formidable challenge in the region. The solution would at first appear to lie in the design and implementation of policies geared towards economic growth. However, the tsunami tragedy of December 2004 introduced another dimension in public policy — the need for the capacity to anticipate climatic, environmental and other changes impacting on the life and well-being of the people. Therefore, in addition to economic growth and poverty alleviation concerns, public administration revitalization must of necessity include the competence to read early warning signals and institute the necessary proactive measures. In the small island States, public service revitalization has to address the issues of resource mobilization and allocation and, in the light of each State's relatively small size, of "economy of scale".

16. The challenges facing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) include how to build and strengthen the institutions capable of engaging in a variety of activities, among them, sustaining the wide-ranging governance and economic transformation that started in the 1990s; confronting the risk of State capture by organized crime; generating economic growth; creating gainful employment; improving the people's living standards; and ensuring regional peace and stability. Proximity to the European Union (EU) serves as an additional incentive to public administration reform in a number of the CIS member States.

17. Latin America and the Caribbean, with a combined population of 518.8 million, faces a major challenge in poverty eradication. Of the total population, close to 221 million, or 44 per cent, live in poverty. Of the 221 million classified as poor, 19 per cent are in a state of extreme poverty. The incidence of poverty is higher in rural than in urban areas (54 per cent of rural and 30 per cent of urban households can be classified as poor). The region made substantial progress towards poverty reduction in 1997 only to backslide since then. Between 1999 and 2002, the incidence of poverty rose from 43.8 to 44.0 per cent, while the ratio of people in extreme poverty stayed at 19.4 per cent. Over-reliance on market mechanisms contributed to jobless growth, the gradual collapse of public services and the deepening of poverty and inequality.[8] There are, however, growing signs of a turnaround. Besides taking proactive measures at home, Governments within the region are sponsoring regional cooperation initiatives aimed at stimulating economic growth and improving people's living standards.

III. Public administration revitalization: dominant concerns, thrusts for reform and emerging trends

18. The complex and dramatic challenges facing the world place a heavy burden on public administration. The signs on the horizon also point to increasing awareness on the part of Governments and their civil society partners that the world of public administration is on the threshold of change and that assistance is needed in making the right choices. The countries that responded to the questionnaire

(annex I) confirmed this observation and provided concrete evidence of measures instituted to reform and revitalize their public administration systems during the past 10 years.

19. The measures adopted by many countries in recent years to reform and strengthen public administration systems differ from those instituted in the 1980s and the early 1990s. First, in contrast to the revitalization agendas of the 1980s, which were formulated at the insistence of external financial and donor institutions, recent reforms are more likely to be "home-grown" and directed at specific problems and challenges. Second, rather than focusing narrowly on cost-cutting issues and seeing public administration revitalization from a doctrinaire, supply-side economics angle, recent revitalization measures have multiple objectives and rely on a variety of pragmatic change management strategies. Above all, contemporary revitalization measures differ from earlier ones in terms of the emphasis given not only to the application of "business" and "customer satisfaction" techniques — a carry-over from the early days of New Public Management — but also to the entrenchment of fundamental public service values and ethics.

20. The challenges highlighted in the preceding paragraphs have in one way or another informed the actions taken to revitalize public administration systems in the past 10 years. While the responses to the questionnaire administered by the Secretariat pointed to the differences in the Member States' priorities, they also highlighted issues of common concern. Fine-tuning and consolidating New Public Management reforms and applying information and communication technologies to internal management and external service-delivery processes are among the dominant concerns in well-established public administration systems. By contrast, in the former command economies of Central and Eastern Europe, the western Balkans and the Commonwealth of Independent States, and in many of the emerging market economies of Asia, Latin America and, to some extent, the Middle East and Africa, the raison d'être of public administration revitalization was to prepare public administration systems for the challenges of democratic governance and for the implementation of market reforms. In countries emerging from conflict, revitalization was expected to be an integral part of the State reconstruction process, and a means of stemming the decay of State and civil society institutions.

21. Within the European Union (and among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries), public administration revitalization is at once a straightforward and complex exercise. For the older members of the European Union, whose administrative systems are founded on more or less similar and deep-rooted values, revitalization simply entails reorienting internal processes towards external demands, rather than subjecting the systems to radical, roots-and-branch restructuring. In recent years, however, the longer-standing members of the Union have had to grapple with complex public policy challenges, not the least of which is the reconciliation of citizen expectations with fiscal and budget constraints. The recent "No" vote in France and the Netherlands is putatively a rebuff to the draft constitution of the European Union, but the verdict actually highlights a deepening concern on how to resolve the crisis of the welfare state. That crisis has far-reaching implications for public administration revitalization in the EU as a whole. For the new members, entry into the Union marks a major turning point at which difficult public choices have to be made, and substantial adjustments in institutions, management practices, and processes become absolutely essential. Since the EU is a community of values, the new entrants

would, in forging ahead with their public administration revitalization plans, need to bring recruitment, promotion and service-delivery standards up to the EU level and ensure that public officials subscribe to a common code of professional ethics.

Emerging revitalization measures and trends

22. While the limited response to the above-mentioned questionnaire (annex) cautions against drawing firm conclusions on perspectives in, and the state of, public administration in Member States, there are strong indications of commitment to the revitalization of public institutions worldwide. The recent eagerness to embrace change goes against the trend that started in the 1980s when public service reform was, in many countries, a part of cost-cutting economic restructuring programmes, implemented at the urging of international financial and donor institutions, and widely perceived as an "external imposition". In much of today's world, and as Governments acknowledge the necessity to reassess the workings of public administration and to orient public institutions towards citizen concerns, revitalization is viewed not as a bitter pill to be reluctantly swallowed, but as a natural and prudent response to escalating challenges. The major challenge is how to make a transition from commitment to action. This requires forging strong coalitions for change.

23. Notwithstanding differences within and across regions, the rationale frequently cited for embarking on revitalization efforts includes the following:

(a) Promoting ethics, transparency and accountability;

(b) Enhancing public service efficiency and effectiveness, especially in the delivery of public services (however, interest in performance and productivity management and in value-for-money auditing has been particularly observed in developed economies, emerging markets and economies in transition);

(c) Ensuring the responsiveness of public administration to citizen needs and legitimate demands (through the adoption of citizen charters, dissemination of service pledges, and implementation of quality service initiatives);

(d) Promoting human development (and achieving the Millennium Development Goals);

(e) Promoting economic growth and macroeconomic stability (by acquiring and applying the capacity to implement programmes geared towards promoting investor confidence and creating an environment conducive to private sector participation in development).

24. Other reasons cited for revitalizing administrative systems, though less frequently than the preceding ones, are as follows:

(a) Preventing and resolving conflict, and development of emergency preparedness and community policing (for countries faced with threats to security or emerging from conflict);

(b) Applying information and communication technologies to improve internal management processes and external service delivery systems, and promoting civil service automation (this is especially the case in well-established and rapidly changing administrative systems);

(c) Repositioning the public service for the challenges of democratization and economic liberalization (Africa, Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States);

(d) Promoting popular participation in local governance and implementing decentralization programmes (an aspect of democratic reform);

(e) Preparing national economies for integration into larger entities (for countries seeking admission into the European Union, accession to the *acquis communautaire* is a prerequisite, which entails subscribing to certain basic governance and public service values);

(f) Creating an environment conducive to private sector growth and development;

(g) Coupling pay and employment reforms with the reassignment of posts and miscellaneous redundancy management programmes.

25. Among the issues on which there is a convergence of views are those relating to the integrity, efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of public institutions, as well as to the significance of the role played by those institutions in promoting economic growth, macroeconomic stability and human development. Without reading too much unanimity into the responses from the Member States, it is possible to add that the measures and strategies frequently applied by countries in achieving their revitalization objectives include the enactment of new laws and regulations (cited by 73.7 per cent of the respondents), personnel and human resources management and training (68.4 per cent), organizational restructuring (65.8 per cent), the adoption of anti-corruption measures (55.3 per cent) and the deployment of information and communication technology capacities to provide quality service (55.3 per cent). At the same time, privatization and enhancement of the law-making capacities of the legislature were among options not frequently cited (36.8 and 39.5 per cent respectively). A few of the responses indicated the challenges encountered in outsourcing essential services, particularly the challenges of accountability and quality control.

26. For countries emerging from dictatorial rule, particular emphasis has been given to the enactment of career-oriented civil service laws; the creation or strengthening of institutions responsible for public service management; the review of recruitment practices to ensure that they conform to the highest standards of integrity, competence and professionalism; entrenchment of the values of political impartiality and non-partisanship; adoption of measures to insulate the "career service" from political influences; and the organization of programmes to provide training and upgrade skills.

27. Reports of experiences in "engaged governance" in some countries further testify to the importance accorded by recent revitalization programmes to issues of concern to the people. In addition to promoting the adoption of participatory development planning and budgeting approaches, the programmes have led to the establishment of one-stop service-delivery centres in national public administration systems. Variously termed "citizen centres", "service assistance to citizens", or "people first", these quality service initiatives have one common objective — to place public administration at the service of the people and, by so doing, to alleviate poverty and promote development.

28. One item that consistently appears on revitalization agendas in all regions of the world is public integrity. It is a revitalization challenge that transcends geographic, economic, socio-political and cultural boundaries, and it serves as a linchpin in contemporary revitalization efforts. The growing interest in public integrity (also referred to as "ethics and values", "ethics and accountability", "transparency", etc.) should not come as a surprise. Aside from its role in consolidating the gains of fiscal, macroeconomic, management, institutional and other "technocratic" reforms, the focus on integrity proves critical in reviving and reasserting traditional public administration values and ethos, particularly those that had, in a number of countries, succumbed to systematic politicization or had been subverted by the tendencies of New Public Management towards "corporatization" and the downgrading of rules.

29. Over and above the measures reported by the respondents, the actions taken to date attest to the importance accorded to public integrity worldwide. Particularly in the last five years, when reports of ethical violations have undermined citizen trust in public and business organizations, Governments in different parts of the world have mounted multipronged assaults on grand and petty corruption. Among the measures adopted are the enactment of strict anti-corruption laws; the establishment of anti-corruption, assets declaration and allied watch-dog bodies; the restructuring of judicial and law enforcement agencies; and the enhancement of the agencies' investigative, data-gathering and information-sharing capacities. Freedom-of-information laws were enacted in a few countries, and in many others civil society organizations and the media were enlisted as allies in the fight against corruption. Over time, a broad measure of consensus was reached on the outline and contents of global and regional anti-corruption conventions — examples of which are the United Nations Convention Against Corruption;[9] the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime;[10] the Inter-American Convention Against Corruption adopted by the Organization of American States on 29 March 1996; the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Officials in International Business Transactions, adopted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development on 21 November 1997; and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption, adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the African Union on 11 July 2003.

30. The measures adopted within and across countries to entrench the principles of merit, professionalism, accountability, "customer care" and citizen responsiveness complement efforts at mainstreaming high ethical standards in public administration systems. From the western Balkans, through Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, to Latin America, the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, and Africa, a great deal of effort has gone into the enactment of laws and the formulation of codes aimed at delineating the "career service" from offices falling within the political patronage net. Examples include the miscellaneous civil service laws enacted in countries preparing to join the EU, the Charter for the Public Service in Africa adopted in Windhoek, Namibia, by the Third Pan-African Conference of the Ministers of Civil Service in February 2001 and the Ibero-American Charter of Public Service adopted in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, by the fifth Ibero-American Conference of Ministers for Public Administration and State Reform on 27 June 2003. The "customer care" and the supporting productivity measurement and performance management initiatives launched in various countries should, if vigorously pursued, give concrete expression to the quest for

professionally competent, ethically sound and citizen-responsive public administration systems, and strengthen the capacity of public institutions to meet development challenges. The challenge, however, is how to ensure enforcement of those measures.

31. A few countries have introduced performance contracting as a way of holding managers accountable. There is merit to this practice. To the extent that the new approach to executive selection makes it possible to tie post occupancy to performance, it could arguably be promoted as a worthy substitute for the career-based system. However, before abandoning recruitment practices founded on the doctrine of security of tenure, it would be necessary to weigh the benefits of contractual appointments against the risks of a resurgence of politicization and patronage.

32. In addition to grappling with the challenges of senior-level recruitments, ongoing revitalization programmes also have to deal with issues of diversity. It is one thing to extol the virtues of professionalism; it is another to adduce compelling and convincing reasons for this public management doctrine in a society polarized along ethnic, religious, gender and cultural lines. In any case, while pursuing the objective of professionalism, it is important not to lose sight of existing policies aimed at redressing the historical disadvantage suffered by particular population groups (particularly women) and ensuring that members of those groups are appointed to key public service positions. In other words, policies designed to enhance professionalism should be implemented pari passu with those aimed at redressing gender disparities.

IV. Lessons learned by Member States from the reform process

33. The responses to the questionnaire indicate that in the last five years Member States have no longer been applying externally developed formulas, but rather they are increasingly recapturing the initiative and assuming responsibility for the revitalization of their public administration systems, ensuring that the choices made are dictated by genuine needs. There is further evidence that in implementing home-grown and demand-driven reforms, Member States have learned a few additional lessons. Notable among them are the multifaceted and complex nature of modern public administration systems; the difficulty in deciding on workable reform and revitalization strategies; the need to focus on "quick wins" while devising coherent, long-term strategies for challenges defying instant solutions; the role of capacity-building in ensuring the successful implementation as well as sustainability of reforms; the implications for resources; the politics of reform and revitalization; the role of leadership in championing the cause of change and surmounting change management problems; and the pivotal role of civic and private sector organizations in supporting and supplementing the delivery of services and in enforcing accountability. Other lessons learned concern the linkage between decentralization and people empowerment, the impact of both in the delivery of such Goals-related services as water, primary education and health care, and the need for special revitalization programmes targeted at public administration systems in post-conflict environments. Some of these lessons are examined in the paragraphs below.

A. Appreciating the complexity and holistic nature of modern public administration

34. As the Member States grapple with different facets of revitalization, they come to understand the essence of modern public administration, particularly its homogenizing, supra-sector and multidisciplinary thrust, and, consequently, its complexity. Accompanying that realization is the growing acknowledgement of the fact that public administration is not simply about fiscal or macroeconomic balances, and much less about downsizing and cost cutting. In a world confronted with the challenges of poverty and growing inequality, and exposed to the risks of violence and terrorism, organized and constitutional Government becomes the only guarantee of personal and collective security. However, no matter how organized and constitutional a Government is, it would not get very far in the absence of a public administration system capable of translating its broad political intentions, enforcing its laws and delivering the services needed by the people. Without a professionally competent public administration, the State cannot count on making those things happen which it wants to see happen, or on pre-empting undesirable developments. Above all, achieving the broad and the specific (sector focused) objectives of Government requires that organizational plans be properly laid out, processes defined and knowledge and skills from diverse fields be productively channelled towards a common goal.

35. The growing and insistent demand for integrity in public life further emphasizes the complexity of modern public administration. The contemporary world is not content with a "capable" State; it demands a State that is responsive, accountable, transparent and ethically upright. As the State's "front door office", public administration systems are under increasing pressure to manifest the highest moral standards and to be the instrument with which society's civilizing mission is accomplished. Whereas the corporate world perceives the rules as a restraint it could do without in a competitive setting, public administration accountability is generally monitored against specified legal provisions. In contrast to the boards of private corporations that are accountable only to their shareholders, public administration officials have to answer to wider and diverse constituencies, to civic groups and ultimately to society at large.

B. Finding the winning revitalization strategies

36. The complex nature of public administration presents the design and implementation of revitalization programmes with an immediate problem — that of deciding on the strategy or options to apply in meeting ongoing and unfolding challenges. Most often, countries that embark on the reform and revitalization of their public administration systems are faced with a whole range of choices — from straightforward downsizing, through comprehensive review and restructuring of organizational systems and implementation of complementary capacity-building programmes, to the inauguration of anti-corruption campaigns. Deciding which strategy works calls for the application of highly sophisticated analytic and diagnostic techniques and for the involvement of all stakeholders, particularly civil society actors, in the design (and implementation) of reform projects.

C. Focusing on "quick wins"

37. Related to the question of how to pick the winning strategies are others, such as where to start, how to sequence operations and what to do to ensure that action in one area does not negate other revitalization choices. The experiences reported by Member States clearly indicate that revitalization is both an event and a process. Where the problems to be tackled are easy to diagnose and the choices are fairly clear (and/or limited), it is possible to design time-bound revitalization "projects". Examples include the design of processes and work layout, the construction of an information and communication technology infrastructure, the procurement and installation of hardware and software for the systems and the training of staff in information and communication technology applications. These are among the "quick wins" that would, it is hoped, stimulate other revitalization processes.

38. However, when it comes to such complex problems as organizational restructuring, staff reassignment, ethics mainstreaming and attitude change, the managers of the reform programmes have had to brace themselves and all the stakeholders for hard choices. Problems of this nature call for the design of a holistic programme, the application of long-term strategic planning techniques and the adoption of measures aimed at involving all the internal (public service) and external (civil society and private sector) stakeholders in the analysis, clarification, implementation and monitoring of the coming change. While office equipment may be speedily procured without too much disruption in the workflow, changes that have an impact on the careers, livelihood, and ingrained habits of individuals need a more subtle approach. At the very least, such changes must reckon with individual fears and insecurity.

D. Acquiring and building capacities for reform and revitalization

39. Public administration revitalization is, as mentioned above, a complex process. Diagnosing public service problems, conceptualizing, designing, implementing and monitoring change-triggering processes, and implementing key activities — those and other revitalization processes require the presence of individuals with the appropriate knowledge, skills, networks and attitudes. Even a revitalization programme component as simple as the computerization of personnel processes cannot take off without a corps of information and communication technology specialists and without the exposure of non-specialists (in "line" as well as administrative and finance units) to computer literacy training. In fact, one obstacle encountered so far in implementing the provisions of the public service charters (and codes of conduct) adopted in various countries and regions is the lack of awareness on the part of public officials and their civil society interlocutors about the contents of the charters.[11]

40. In many countries, public administration remains weak largely owing to a shortage of human resources and to deficiencies in staff training and motivation. For poor, resource-constrained countries, the reform challenges are daunting, not because the countries do not know what to do, but because they lack the resources to initiate and sustain a comprehensive programme of change. The lesson therefore is that revitalizing public administration systems goes beyond producing new organigrams and workflow charts and entails recruiting, training, deploying and motivating the personnel capable of operating the new processes. To sum up, a

revitalization programme that is not supported with an appropriately trained and duly motivated cadre of staff is not sustainable.[12]

41. To meet their capacity-building needs, a number of countries have turned to external donors for assistance. However, assistance from such donors places additional capacity burdens on the aid recipients — particularly the need to acquaint themselves with and reconcile conflicting donor priorities and to project logical frameworks, accounting procedures and reporting formats. The solution lies partly in exposing those associated with the design and implementation of revitalization programmes to basic training in aid negotiation, coordination and management, but more especially in the acquisition and deployment of the capacity to coordinate donor assistance. To confront the problem of "ownership" and domestic control — a problem exacerbated by the proliferation of donor-driven priorities — it is essential that an office — preferably an existing one — located at the highest level of Government be assigned the mandate of defining the strategic framework that would enable the Government to monitor and decide on the relevance, sequencing and integration of assistance from diverse sources.

E. Financing the revitalization of public administration

42. Reports from various countries confirm that revitalization is an expensive operation. Even after discounting the consulting and technical assistance costs, countries still have to earmark huge amounts of resources for staff training, project implementation and monitoring, and report writing as well as for the day-to-day management and coordination of reform projects. Nevertheless, the long-term sustainability of public administration reform measures warrants the commitment of a substantial amount of resources to that end.

F. Handling the politics of change

43. The experiences reported to the Secretariat reveal the political aspects of reform and revitalization. Far from being a purely technical, value-neutral process, the act of shaking a public administration system to its roots disturbs not only the officials whose careers are at stake but also other external stakeholders. The legislative branch, for one, may have its own idea of the directions the revitalization process should take, while civic groups and private sector "consumers" of public goods line up behind alternative and conflicting agendas. Failure to address the political question (and to reckon with internal political disputes) in fact proved detrimental to the successful implementation of reforms in a number of countries. The more diverse a society is, the greater the need for the adoption of holistic and inclusive approaches to public service revitalization.

G. Acknowledging the role of leadership in the revitalization process

44. Another important lesson learned by Member States is that public administration revitalization efforts stand a good chance of succeeding when they benefit from high-level sponsorship. The measures reported in the last section would not have materialized if government and public service leadership in each country had not fully grasped the magnitude of the challenges facing them and

acknowledged the need to revitalize public administration institutions, processes and service-delivery modalities. The imprint of that leadership is certainly on the macroeconomic and institutional reforms undertaken in many countries during the last decade and on the adoption of the national, regional, and international anti-corruption initiatives and public service charters mentioned previously.

V. Future directions in the revitalization of public administration

45. Taking into account the challenges encountered and the lessons learned, the focus in the future should be on consolidating the gains of the reform and revitalization measures instituted in the last 10 years. Specifically, there is a need to underscore the role of public administration in development, to strengthen public administration knowledge-sharing networks and to invest in institutional capacity-building and human resource development.

A. Status and identity of public administration

46. By its resolution 50/225, the General Assembly sent a powerful message on the role of public administration in development. By that singular act, the Assembly gave the profession of public administration a clear identity and, with that, the confidence that public administration systems needed to proceed with reform and revitalization plans. However, while public administration is increasingly emerging as a community of practice, its status as a discipline and formal field of study needs rehabilitation. The schools and institutes of public administration established in many countries in the 1960s have fallen victim to widespread scepticism and neglect and consequently have been denied the resources needed to extend the horizon of knowledge in the field.

47. To ensure that the study of public administration does not lag too far behind developments in practice, it is advisable that a new programme of action be launched, aimed at rehabilitating public administration education and training institutions, matching their curricula with the clients' needs, enhancing their teaching, research and consulting capacities, and improving their standards of performance. To ensure the successful initiation of the programme, the Assembly may wish to mandate the Secretariat to solicit inputs from Governments and from the public administration training schools themselves, and to coordinate processes leading up to the design, implementation and periodic review of the programme.

B. Information-sharing among Member States

48. The revitalization of public administration would be greatly facilitated if Governments instituted measures aimed at transforming public institutions into knowledge networks and "learning organizations". That would require, at a minimum, constructing the information and communication infrastructure that would enable public service organizations to acquire "cutting edge" knowledge in their fields of operation and to keep up with developments likely to affect their ability to accomplish ongoing and strategic objectives.

49. Effective responses to contemporary challenges depend particularly on the ability of public service organizations to collect, process, store and retrieve critical development information — especially information on macroeconomic trends, programme accomplishments, budget allocation patterns relative to declared priorities, performance constraints, resource flows and on good practices and/or failed experiments in attainment of Millennium Development Goal targets within and across countries.

50. The United Nations Online Network in Public Administration (UNPAN) offers a wide scope to public administration systems that sincerely wish to share knowledge and information with their counterparts in different parts of the world. Since its inauguration over five years ago, the Network has served as a hub for the exchange of vital data on governance and public administration. With additional support, the Network will be able to provide a medium for the exchange of information and knowledge on good practices in public service revitalization.

51. In addition, it is essential that the role of the United Nations in promoting knowledge and information networks be maintained. That is the essence of the global and regional forums organized on specific public administration themes and of the policy meetings convened by the Secretariat to address the challenges facing the specialized fields (e.g. revenue and tax administration, budgeting and financial management, human resources management, decentralized governance, institution-building and reforms, and information and communication technology applications) making up the public administration profession. One of the goals of the meetings is to create communities of practice that promote the sharing of experiences and knowledge among policymakers, administrators and experts.

C. Capacity-building and human resource development

52. Successful implementation of public service revitalization programmes hinges on the efforts that Governments make to maintain a proper balance between the institutional and human aspects of public administration. As the third session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration observed, surmounting the obstacles to realization of the Millennium Development Goals requires, at minimum, addressing underlying institutional questions such as the entrenchment of good governance ethos and practices, the enforcement of the rule of law, the promotion of equity and equality and the building of the capacity to prevent strife and to foster peace and security.

53. Since the Millennium Development Goals are conceived in programmatic (rather than "project") terms, their successful implementation hinges on the extent to which State institutions and their civil society partners are able to apply holistic intervention strategies in place of the "sector" approaches they were used to. This dictates a radical change in mindset — a change from bureaucratic "turf protection" to teamwork, and from narrow departmentalization to interdepartmental (joint) programming.

54. Institutions are as good as the people who operate them. Therefore, while giving due attention to the mechanics of institutions (e.g. the legal and constitutional provisions of each institution's mandate and internal hierarchical and horizontal relationships), it is essential that the design of institutions takes into account organic aspects. It is the organic set of attributes that gives each institution

its unique character and determines its goal-attainment capacity. The organic attributes include, but are by no means limited to, the knowledge, skills, attitudes and, above all, the character of the interested parties — particularly, the individuals responsible for managing the institutions' affairs as well as the civil society actors brought into direct or indirect relationship with the institutions. It is by giving adequate attention to the human angle — particularly, the motives and the actions of individuals — that current and future revitalization programmes can expect to have a substantive impact on internal processes and the quality of service provided to clients.

55. In addition to addressing the broad institutional questions, the next wave of capacity-building programmes needs to include the provision of training and advisory services on critical revitalization themes, for example the role of public administration in wealth creation (instead of the previous focus on "poverty alleviation"); productivity and performance management; ethics mainstreaming strategies; aid negotiation, coordination and management; leadership and change management; decentralization policies and strategies; and civic engagement in public service revitalization.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

56. The coming years will be crucial for public administration systems the world over. Besides contributing to efforts at alleviating poverty, the systems will be required to create conditions essential to the pursuit of wealth creation and broad development objectives. In anticipation of their expanded role, a number of them have, in the last 5 to 10 years, adopted a variety of reform and revitalization measures, among them the adoption of performance management, quality service and "customer care"; engaged governance initiatives; the application of information and communication technologies; and the implementation of anti-corruption programmes. However, while the "practice" of public administration has advanced rapidly in recent years, as a result of resolution 50/225, its "study" remains trapped in the minimalist mindset of the 1980s. That difference has serious implications for efforts at resolving a number of contradictions uncovered in the wake of the reform and revitalization measures undertaken in the last 10 years. Among the tensions that schools and institutes of public administration should have helped resolve are those between the demand for bureaucratic cultural change and the benefits of institutional stability, between managerial flexibility and the sanctity of the rules, between the domestic mandate of Government and its international (as well as regional) obligations and between short-term pursuits and long-term strategic concerns.

57. Another crucial challenge to be addressed is that relating to the sustainability of reforms. Nothing is more detrimental to popular enthusiasm for change than to start with a burst of action followed by a long period of uncertainty and finally ending with few or no results. That is the case with reform programmes that are promulgated from the top — and viewed at the bottom with deep suspicion and/or as a potential source of traumas and tension. The best procedure is to involve the rank and file from the beginning to the end of the reform cycle — that is, from the conceptualization, through the analysis of risks, to the design and implementation of the key reform components.

58. **The United Nations has a key role to play in helping Member States meet the challenges outlined in the present report, as follows:**

(a) **The Organization should continue to promote the adoption of common principles and standards relating to the functioning of public administration, such as those enshrined in the regional and international conventions and in regional charters;**

(b) **It should strengthen its activities aimed at sharing information, knowledge and successful experiences through the organization of global and regional forums as well as through the expansion of the United Nations Online Network in Public Administration;**

(c) **It should promote linkages between and among administrations with a view to fostering horizontal exchanges, particularly through the creation of communities of practice;**

(d) **It should promote innovation in Government and public administration by strengthening the rewarding mechanism of the United Nations Public Service Awards and by assisting Governments in creating the necessary environment for fostering and rewarding innovation;**

(e) **In view of the crucial role human resources play in the reform process, a global initiative aimed at enhancing the research, teaching and training capacity of schools and institutes of public administration should be launched;**

(f) **It should continue to provide specialized technical assistance to developing countries in support of ongoing and planned public administration revitalization measures with a view to promoting home-grown and sustainable reform processes;**

(g) **It should strengthen partnerships with other international and regional organizations as well as with public administration associations to maximize the impact of its activities.**

59. **The General Assembly is encouraged to remain informed on the ongoing processes of revitalization of public administration systems around the world and on how they contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals.**

Notes

[1] The tsunami tragedy of December 26, 2004 (see para. 15) is an example of challenges requiring the deployment of disaster preparedness and management capacities and their constant upgrading as part of the ongoing public administration revitalization efforts.

[2] Examples include the constantly mutating strains of the Ebola virus and the avian flu.

[3] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 2001: Making New Technologies Work for Human Development* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001). See also UNDP and United Nations Children's Fund, "The Millennium Development Goals in Africa: promises and prospects", a report prepared at the request of the G-8 Personal Representatives for Africa (New York, 2002).

[4] United Nations, *World Population Monitoring, 2003: Population, Education and Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.XIII.12).

[7] United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 2001* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2001).

[8] Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, *Analysis of Performance and Assessment of Growth and Productivity in the ESCWA Region*, 2nd Issue (E/ESCWA/EAD/2004/2).

[9] International Fund for Agricultural Development, *Assessment of Rural Poverty: Asia and the Pacific* (Rome, 2002).

[10] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Institute of Applied Economic Research, and United Nations Development Programme, 2002, *Meeting the Millennium Poverty Reduction Targets in Latin America and the Caribbean* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.G.125).

[9] Resolution 58/4 of 31 October 2003, annex.

[10] Resolution 55/25 of 15 November 2000, annex I.

[11] See *Declaración Final, Foro Iberoamericano: Revitalización de la Administración Publica. Estrategias para la Implantación de la Carta Iberoamericana de la Función Publica*, Mexico, 5 and 6 May 2005 (Final Declaration of the Ibero-American Forum on Revitalization of Public Administration: Strategies for Implementing the Ibero-American Charter of the Public Service).

[12] This is one of the conclusions of the 2005 *World Public Sector Report*. See United Nations, *World Public Sector Report, 2005: Unlocking the Human Potential for Public Sector Performance* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

Annex

Questionnaire for the Governments of the Member States

I. In the past 10 years, has your Government undertaken measures aimed at revitalizing public administration or parts of it?

Yes_____ No_____

If "No", please discontinue and return the questionnaire.

If "Yes", please continue with questions II-VIII below and return the questionnaire.

II. Which priorities have necessitated revitalizing your country's public administration or parts of it?

E.g.:

1. Macroeconomic stability/economic growth _____
2. Human development (e.g. achieving the Millennium Development Goals) _____
3. Inclusion of civil society in policy development _____
4. Responsiveness to the needs of citizens _____
5. Conflict prevention and resolution _____
6. Public safety and security _____
7. Transparency and accountability _____
8. Efficiency _____
9. Effectiveness _____
10. Other (please specify)

[Check all that apply.]

III. For each of the chosen priorities:

1. Name specific goals that the policy of revitalization of public administration has been pursuing;
2. Assess the outcomes achieved to-date.

IV. For each of the chosen priorities, name the most important measures used to achieve the goals in the process of revitalization of the public administration:

E.g.:

1. Involvement of civic groups in design of policies and programmes _____
2. Enhanced law-making and oversight capacity of the legislature _____
3. Enhanced independence and integrity of the judiciary _____
4. Enhanced independence and integrity of the audit institutions _____

5. Adoption of new laws/regulations _____

6. Adjustment of processes/procedures/practices (e.g. results-based management/budgeting, work process re-engineering) _____

7. Financial management _____

8. Specific anti-corruption measures _____

9. Freedom of information act and measures _____

10. Civil service reform _____

11. Personnel and human resources management/training _____

12. Restructuring (e.g. creation/elimination/merger within and between government departments; decentralization, etc.) _____

13. Decentralization _____

14. Networking within the Government as well as between the Government, business firms and civil society organizations _____

15. Creation of parastatals or special operating agencies _____

16. Privatization _____

17. Deployment of information and communication technologies (i.e. e-government) _____

18. Other (specify)

[Check all that apply.]

V. For each of the chosen measures, provide a short description of:

1. The conditions that have suggested the use of such a measure;

2. The change that this measure has produced.

VI. How has the process of revitalizing public administration been managed, monitored and evaluated?

VII. What have been the lessons learned?

VIII. Identify the challenges that the public administration will face in your country in the next 10 years.